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The Cheerful Letter

Every place a church; every day the Lord's day; all events blessings; all joy thanksgiving; and all nature and life full of Good.—James Freeman Clarke.

Vol. XLIII DECEMBER, 1934 No. 6

BLACK AND SILVER

By Grace Noll Crowell

Within dark firs on Christmas nights
  Men set their strange and glowing fires—
The red and green and purple lights
  Of globes that burn on unseen wires.

But on His birth-night, none of these.
  The black and silver of the skies
Were all the colors then; the trees
  Were left unlit before His eyes.

And black and silver was His way—
  Ah, darkened was the road He went;
But many a silver night and day
  Among Judean hills He spent.

And down beside the silver sea
  He taught and healed until the light
Had gone from glittering Galilee
  And left Him homeless in the night.

Then silver was His price at last,
  And black the hill that will not dim!
Ah, black and silver! still they cast
  Their shadows down the years for Him.

THE CHRIST-CHILD'S MOTHER

A Christmas Sermon for Parents

Luke ii. 19: *"But Mary kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart."*

At least once in the year, as Christmas approaches, poetry breaks in upon the humdrum prose of life and transforms it into lyric beauty. Familiar as the Christmas story is, we love to live it over again in imagination, because there lingers in each one of us something of the heart of a child, and because, to the child, the story's familiarity is no drawback, but rather an enhancement of its beauty. And so each Christmas we choose some one feature of that beloved chronicle, and in its implications find our Christmas message. Usually we place our emphasis on the angel song of "Peace on earth, good will to men," or on the scene in the stable, when the Wise Men from the East seek out the child of destiny and pay him homage.

Strangely enough, however, as we choose the incident or the description in the Christmas story which appeals most strongly to us, we usually overlook the very person to whom all these symbolic events meant most—Mary, the mother of the Christ-Child. Our thoughts and our interest are likely to be centered, naturally enough, upon the sleeping babe lying in the straw-filled manger. And yet the one most directly concerned in the occurrences of that night was Mary of Nazareth, a stranger in unaccustomed surroundings, in her hour of need. Let us, therefore, gratefully think of her and of her gift to the world.

She is far from home and friends, when her supreme hour strikes. She is in a rough stable, without any of the comforts, and with few of the necessities of life. The only heat is the warmth from the friendly cattle tied at the stanchions near by. But hardships and rude surroundings do not matter to one in the presence of the great mystery of a new life. Discomforts do not count with one who has experienced the commonest of all miracles and who holds in her arms her first-born son. Anguish is forgotten in the glory of motherhood. Angels might sing, wise men bring gifts, but Mary's hour of triumph needs no outward celebration. Her peace and contentment lie within—in the heart's consciousness that here is her contribution to the world, that this tiny, helpless babe is the complete justification of her

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life.

As she lies there, radiant in her happiness, the door opens and the Bethlehem shepherds appear, telling their wondrous story and repeating the message from the skies. Excited talk fills the stable, words of marvelous import are spoken, the wondering cattle move uneasily in their places. "But Mary," so our text narrates, "kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart."

And every mother, like Mary of old, ponders in her heart, and speculates as to the future of the child asleep in her arms. Nothing seems impossible to the mother at that prophetic hour. The dreams of motherhood are both selfish and unselfish, forgivably selfish, as she measures how much this child's love is to mean in her life; unselfish, as she pictures what her child may eventually accomplish to serve the world.

We can only guess what things Mary pondered in her heart that first Christmas morning, but human nature is the same the world over, and the love of parent for child is the highest love we know, outside the love of God. Because we remember what we ourselves have felt, we can imagine what was in Mary's heart—the joy, the pride, the hope, and the purpose. With a mother's intuition, she knew, without the shepherds telling her, that she held in her arms a child of high destiny. To her there was nothing strange in the wise men coming from afar to bear gifts. To whom could they more fittingly render homage than to this child in whom lay all the measureless possibilities of humanity? The old masters were right when they painted in the eyes of their Madonnas an expression which seems to look far ahead into the future—a look of high responsibility and exalted purpose. In Mary's eyes is the look of one who, for a moment, has pierced the veil of life's mystery. And I would suggest that Christ, himself, became the man he was, in large measure, because of what Mary pondered in her heart that Christmas morning.

The Christ we know is the Christ of manhood, emerging from the background of the wilderness fully equipped for his stupendous task. We forget the years which preceded his appearance, the years concerning which the records give no hint. And yet, those unrecorded, formative years must have been a period of supreme importance. Then it was he received those indelible impressions, those inner impulses, and those habits of thought and faith which were his preparation for his exalted mission. As a child, when he watched his father at the carpenter's bench, or sat in the doorway listening to his mother's stories of Israel's heroes and prophets, he was receiving not only his training for life and its problems, but also spiritual incentive for the task which lay ahead.

Through those early, peaceful years at Nazareth, the boy Jesus was unconsciously absorbing Mary's faith and being influenced by those hopes and purposes over which she had pondered in the Bethlehem stable. In her heart was the ideal of what her son should be, and toward that ideal she was daily shaping and molding him. From the hour of his birth she had dedicated him to high purposes, and her consecration of self to her responsibility could not fail to stir his noblest instincts and to quicken his spiritual impulses. It was she who, in her homely way, first taught him to distinguish the true from the false, the worthy from the unworthy, the essentials from the nonessentials. Those years are without record, but we can guess their simple history, and we must give full credit to Mary for her devoted guidance. She was faithful to her self-appointed task, and, as the years went by, she must have known the joyous satisfaction of

seeing the promise of her dreams gradually turning to fulfillment. Of course she knew that the time must come when she would have to face separation. Like every mother the world over, she realized that; but when her son at last must go out into the world of men, she was determined he should go as nearly as possible like that picture she had drawn in her heart that Christmas morning in Bethlehem.

Is there not a Christmas message for every parent in the thought of Mary, silently meditating over her son's future, nineteen centuries ago, in the stable of the Bethlehem inn? We are what we are largely by grace of the parenthood which lovingly fashioned us, in our unconscious and thoughtless youth. The great men of history—the saviors and prophets of humanity—owe more than we ordinarily imagine to the ideals and hopes of those who bore them and who molded their plastic natures into beauty and grace.

And if our children are to grow brave and strong, upright and useful, it behooves us, like Mary, to ponder deeply. What is it we desire for our children? Do we covet fame and popularity, riches, luxuries, and leisure for them? But, after all, these things are only incidental. Whether or not they come into our children's lives matters very little. What really counts is on an entirely different plane. We want them first of all to be right-minded and strong-hearted men and women, whether or not riches or fame are ever theirs. We want them to be public servants, not self-seekers. We want them to know the joy and satisfaction of serving the world.

In short, we want the Christ-spirit in their lives, the Christ-patience, purity, good will, and generosity in their hearts. That ought to be the hope and the prayer of each one of us. For, after all, what they are to be very largely depends upon what we are hoping for them now. Their destiny depends upon the sort of spiritual environment with which we surround them.

Here is the farthest-reaching obligation which is ever laid upon us. For our children tend to form their ideas from our own, and unconsciously model their lives according to the pattern of our own actions and habits. They intuitively read our thoughts, our standards become theirs, their ideals imitate ours, and their ambitions take color from the aims and purposes they see in us.

This is the basic responsibility of human parenthood, and if we are ever to meet that responsibility worthily, we must have the help of religion. Without some spiritual interpretation of life and its duties, we are easily confused and turned aside to the nonessentials. Not only for ourselves, but also for our children, we need a scale of values different from that of the marketplace. We crave the sense of spiritual harmony and the broader horizons which come with religious faith. To meet life's issues and crises we must have the poise, perspective, and incentive which religion alone can give.

On Christmas, then, let us thank God for the Child, who in manhood taught us what is worth striving for, what is worth believing in, what is worth pondering over, and what is worth passing on to our children. And as we gratefully remember how much we owe to him, let us also pay our homage to her who planted the seed which later burst into such radiant flower; and as Mary, the mother of Christ, kept in her heart the vision of what her son should be, so may we build up in our hearts a worthy ideal for the children of destiny entrusted to our own care and nurture.—*Rev. Abbot Peterson in The Christian Register.*

CANDLELIGHT

By Marjorie Dillon

On Christmas Eve we love to sing
  Old carols while our mother plays;
The wood fire flickers on the hearth,
  And, from the window, mellow rays
Send out their message of good cheer,
  Though dark and cold may be the night;
It's Christmas Eve and we are glad—
  We love to sing by candlelight.

CORRESPONDENTS AND APPEALS

MRS. JOHN A. MCCADDIN, *Chairman*, 21 Ashfield Street, Roslindale, Mass.

A correspondent writing to the Exchange for the first time should always give as reference the name and address of her minister.

When a correspondent moves to a new address, notice should be sent to Headquarters, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass., and to those persons who have been sending letters and reading matter.

It is necessary to state positively that the Cheerful Letter Exchange is not a "clothing bureau" and not a "charitable" society in the usual sense of the word.

It is contrary to the rules of the Cheerful Letter Exchange to allow any one to make use of its magazine by addressing letters asking for money, clothing, or other articles, to those whose names are printed in the paper. This prohibition includes requests to borrow money and the offering of articles for sale. The name of any person who disobeys this rule will be dropped from the list, and any one who receives a request of this description is desired by the Central Committee to return no answer, but to enclose the letter at once to the Chairman of this Department.

Many people do care for just the kind of friendly service for which we are organized. We limit our efforts to them and their wishes.

APPEALS

1. Mrs. Dora Smith, Rt. 1, Polkton, N. C., gets very lonely living in the country far from neighbors and a long distance from town. She would like to receive patchwork pieces or any kind of cheer.

2. Your cheer has afforded me many happy hours. This winter is going to be more lonely than ever without my dear mother. Any kind of cheer would be appreciated, especially scraps, thread or embroidery. The children enjoy picture books and toys. Mrs. A. L. Parker, Rt. 2, Marshville, N. C.

3. Blanche Parsons, Lansing, N. C., is an orphan and gets very lonesome. The joy of her life is receiving mail. She would be glad to get quilt pieces, thread or embroidery designs.

4. I am a young married woman, and live on a farm about 2½ miles from church and school. My greatest delight is in making quilts and rugs, and doing fancy work. My husband would enjoy reading matter. My crippled sister, 15 years old, enjoys pictures and Bible stories. She can't read, but I read to her. Mrs. Rena Tester, Rocky Hill, Ark.

5. Mrs. C. J. Nolen, Rt. 2, Box 74, Bassetts, Va., wishes to thank her *Cheerful Letter* friends for past kindnesses. The Magazine has brought her much cheer. She has four children, and would appreciate quilt pieces and good reading.

6. Many of those to whom I bring cheer with reading matter make quilts, pillows and other articles of fancy work for their homes, including rag rugs. I, therefore, will be grateful for scraps of silk, wool and cotton, bits of yarn and embroidery floss or other items that may be used in fancy work. I will be very glad to make prompt acknowledgment of whatever may be sent me. Rev. Alan Pressley Wilson, 3925 Frisby St., Baltimore, Md.

7. Mrs. J. W. Thompson, Sturgills, N. C., has not been able to walk for three years. Her children would be grateful for school materials.

8. Many thanks for past favors. I am arranging a little entertainment for the poor children of my community for Christmas, and I am calling on the *Cheerful Letter* people for anything to amuse a child, such as books and toys for children from five to thirteen years old. Can anyone send me the *American Magazine* after it has been read? Mrs. Ruby C. Paris, R.F.D. 4, Alpharetta, Ga.

9. Mrs. Onie Wilson, Koch Ridge, Ark., a widow with six girls ranging in age from 4 to 18, would appreciate reading, quilt pieces and embroidery thread.

10. I should be grateful for any kind of books, both educational and fiction, and magazines. My wife would like quilt scraps, thread and embroidery. We have two little boys, 1 and 7 years old. Mr. Turner Pettyjohn, R.F.D. 1, Duluth, Ga.

11. Mrs. Lomie Elliott, Apple Grove, N. C., desires quilt scraps, thread and good reading for herself and little 10-year-old boy.

12. I want to thank everyone who has remembered me and my family with reading and cards. Would someone be kind enough to send me quilt pieces and thread, and also remember the children at Christmas? The boy is 7 years old, and the girls are 5 and 9. I enjoy getting the *Cheerful Letter* Magazine each month. Mrs. Ben Wilson, Rt. 4, Decatur, Tenn.

13. Mrs. J. B. Shepherd, Grayson, N. C., would appreciate sugar and salt bags for quilt linings, patchwork, or anything to help her girls in school, and a toy for baby Lee Roye. She would like some *True Story* Magazines.

14. During the cold winter months, I should like to have bits of thread, scrap work or knitting material. I knit my own stockings when I can get the yarn. Mrs. L. J. Haynes, Rt. 2, Bassetts, Va.

15. Miss Elsie Brammer, Endicott, Va., an orphan 17 years old, lives in the mountains with her grandmother. They would like any kind of cheer and sewing materials.

16. I am 14 years old, and have two sisters and a brother, all younger. We would be glad of reading, pieces and cards. Our mother also gets lonesome. Bertie Light, Endicott, Va.

17. Mrs. Charles Anderson, Sturgills, N. C., writes that she is in poor health, and would appreciate sewing, thread, sugar and salt bags, and scraps to make quilts, which they need badly. Her 16-year-old son, who is in the 7th grade, would be glad of school books, writing tablets, pencils or anything for home study.

18. Mrs. Donnie Jones, Husk, N. C., is grateful for the cheer sent her in the past. She would like quilt pieces and red and green embroidery thread. She hopes her children may be remembered at Christmas. The girl is 6 years old, the boy 2½ and the baby 4 months.

19. I have had lots of sorrow this year, having lost my father and a brother. My only boy has been sick nearly all year, and is a great care. I would be glad of some cheer for him at Christmas. Mrs. R. T. Layne, 236—16th Ave., Hopewell, Va.

20. It would bring much cheer and help to me, as I am kept at home most of the winter months on account of sickness in the family, if some of the kind friends could remember us at Christmas. My boy enjoys reading the *American* and *True Story* magazines. Mrs. G. Lee Roberson, Buffalo Ridge, Va.

21. Mrs. Elsie Jamison, Buffalo Ridge, Va., is very thankful for the *Cheerful Letter* Magazine. She has three boys, aged 8, 11 and 16, and two girls, 4 and 14, whom she would like to have remembered at Christmas. She would appreciate bits of thread and any kind of sewing.

22. Mrs. Pearl Conley, Evensville, Tenn., asks for quilt pieces, embroidery thread, and reading for herself and six children.

23. My health is poor, and it would mean much to me to receive good reading, bits of thread and scraps, especially at Christmas. Maggie Elliott, Apple Grove.

24. Mrs. Lola Eller, Grant, Va., is a widow with two girls, 5 and 11 years old. During the winter, she is confined to the house, so would appreciate embroidery designs and thread, quilt scraps or anything to help pass the lonely hours.

25. I want to thank you all for the help and cheer you have sent me. Will someone please send me quilt scraps, thread and reading; also pencils and paper for the children? I like *Collier's* and other home journals. Mrs. Margaret Johnson, Rt. 2, Box 83, White Top, Va.

26. Mrs. Maggie Richardson, Brandon, N. C., has a large family of children and lives three miles from school. She thanks her *Cheerful Letter* friends for past favors, and wishes to be remembered again this Christmas.

27. I live with my eldest son, and we both are lonely. Would someone send me a few pieces for quilts and anything else at Christmas? Mrs. W. R. Eanes, R.F.D. 2, Bassetts, Va.

28. I would be glad to receive some thread and quilt pieces. I am a widow living alone with my 16-year-old son, who has been paralyzed since he was a baby, and can not work very much. He would enjoy books, magazines or puzzles. Mrs. Etta Rhoades, Rt. 2, Scotland, Ark.

29. Mrs. Retha E. Howell, Bina, N. C., writes that she would like a doll for her 4-year-old girl, and some quilt scraps, thread, and sugar sacks to be used for quilt linings. She has two other girls, 13 and 16 years old, and three boys, 17 months, 7 years and 10 years old.

30. I am a little girl 13 years of age. My mother and grandmother are widows, so we would appreciate your help in any way. Dortha Proter, Scotland, Ark.

31. I think the *Cheerful Letter* is a wonderful magazine, and I want to thank all who have sent cheer. My girls, 18 and 15, twin girls 13, twin boys 8, and mixed twins 2 years old would like to receive something at Christmas time. Mrs. L. L. Pack, Fort Cobb, Okla.

32. It means a lot to me to get mail at Christmas, since I have had much sorrow at that time. I would like good books for my three girls, 13, 17 and 19 years, and something for my two little grandchildren, a girl 6 and a boy 18 months. A fountain pen, quilt pieces and bits of embroidery would be greatly appreciated. Mrs. Emma Blankenship, Rt. 6, Box 68, Roanoke, Va.

33. Miss Mersy M. Testerman, Rt. 1, Box 84, Rugby, Va., would be thankful for anything to help brighten her life, such as embroidery, sewing, reading and knitting.

34. I wish to thank those who have sent me reading, especially the one who sends me the *Cheerful Letter*. I would like to make rag rugs this winter, so would appreciate old stockings or rags. Mrs. J. H. Blevins, Grassy Creek, N. C.

35. Mrs. C. M. Testerman, Box 88, Rugby, Va., is a poor woman with five girls and one boy. Her three oldest girls would appreciate quilt scraps and embroidery thread. She is not able to send three of the children to school.

OFFER

The Brookline, Mass., Branch will send packages of old Christmas cards to those desiring them. Apply to Miss Martha Suter, Sherborn, Mass.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Mrs. Forrest M. Martin from Waxahachie to Rt. 1, Canton, Tex.

Miss Bertha Harper from Republican Grove, Va., to Rt. 3, Nathalie, Va.

Mrs. Ashton Ware, from Murat, Va., to Pedlar Mills, Va.

Mrs. G. Lee Roberson from Dodson, Va., to Buffalo Ridge, Va.

Maggie Elliott from Clifton, N. C., to Apple Grove, N. C.

IN MEMORIAM

Mrs. M. D. Hill, Marshville, N. C.

Mrs. J. M. Sizer, Rhoadesville, Va.
August 21, 1934 Aged 84 years

Loyal and enthusiastic members of
our *Cheerful Letter* family
for many years.

ORIGINS OF CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The Yule log, so long associated with the celebration of Christmas, originally was dedicated, we are told, to the sun, as the light of the world.

It was one of the pagan customs which the early Christian teachers found in Britain, and when the Saxons were converted, the Church did not forbid it, but, instead, allowed it to be transformed into a Christmas custom, the log being kindled in honor of the birthday of the

Light of the World, and the songs sung to the sun being altered to carols in praise of Christ.

Writing from an English environment, Miss Blakelock, in *The Homiletic Review*, tells us something about the origins and character of Christmas customs, many of which have come down to us from pagan times and have been adapted to Christian use with the blessing of the Church.

The American custom of illuminating shrubs in the garden with electric lights at Christmas was brought from Sweden, where it is an old custom to leave lights in the windows of the houses on Christmas Day.

Nearly all the customs have a religious origin:

"For example, the presents given at Christmas are by some said to have been birthday presents suggested by the example of the wise men; similarly with the spices put into the mince pies, the pastry of which was supposed to represent the manger.

"Even the quaint custom in Yorkshire connected with mince pies is rather helpful, as it shows hospitality which is certainly 'good-will,' and teaches everybody that the season of Christmas lasts twelve days.

"The meaning of the custom is that every mince pie eaten in a different house on one of the days of Christmas brings a happy month. So that if any one can find twelve houses where he can eat mince pie he secures a happy year. Dickens says in his wonderful 'Christmas Carol' that wherever *Scrooge* went all over the world he found men humming Christmas tunes, or thinking Christmas thoughts, or remembering some bygone Christmas.

"It is the same today."

The custom of sending Christmas cards is not very old, for we are told that tradition has it that the first Christmas card was sent by W. E. Dobson, R.A., in 1844. He drew a sketch for a distant friend, symbolizing the festive spirit of the season, to show him that absent friends are not forgotten at Christmas.

"To receive Christmas cards depicting the lighted village church covered with snow, the 'waits' singing Christmas carols at midnight in the village street, or the children gathered round the Christmas log," says Miss Blakelock, "not only shows the recipient that he is remembered by his friends, and will be thought of in church and at the social festivities, but it recalls his old associations connected with the season, and this is helpful to him."

Most of the cards are reproductions of old masterpieces. "The Madonna and Child" has been painted by artists of all countries and dates, says the writer, and she narrates:

"I counted eighteen in one gallery alone at an exhibition of Italian pictures, dated 1200 to 1900, held in London recently, and no doubt I should have been able to count as many in the exhibitions of Dutch and Flemish art, if I had thought of it.

"In the curious old stained-glass church windows called 'Jesse Windows' the tree of Jesse culminates in the Virgin and Child, and most churches of all dates contain at least one Christmas picture in the windows. So the designers of Christmas cards have no difficulty in getting reproductions of early pictures."

Music, of course, has also made its contribution to Christmas. St. Ambrose wrote a Christmas hymn in 340 A. D. which was translated by Dr. Neale, who died in 1866. Its first line is "Come thou Redeemer of the earth." St. Germanus wrote "A Great and Mighty Wonder" in 634 A. D.

Of later Christmas hymns which have become popular, Miss Blakelock writes:

"I think the three Christmas hymns most sung in England during the last fifty years are 'While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night,' which was written in 1652 by Nahum Tate; 'Christians, Awake,' written by John Byron in 1690; and 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,' written by Charles Wesley in 1743.

—*The Literary Digest.*

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

God of all the Ages and of the Dayspring within these hearts of ours, we bless thy Name for the Story of long ago, which becomes our story, too, and shall touch with its glory the souls of men for ever. We praise thee for the good tidings of great joy through thy Wondrous Child.

We think of the Babe, so small and tender, lying in the straw of the manger among the patient beasts, whose quiet breathing was his lullaby. And we pray that we may so reverence the Life within ourselves that we may not injure bird or beast in malice or carelessness, or for the sake of vanity; but, having tenderness for all innocent things, may we rejoice in the friendship of faithful creatures.

We think of that Night of waiting, amid the haste and noise of the time, when Mary Mother lay listening to the hurried footsteps of travelers and all the rough sounds of the inn. And we pray for all the Mothers of babes soon to be born; and pray that the compassion of men may be upon all young Children, lest in our greedy tumult and blind speed we bring upon ourselves the condemnation of those who cause little ones to perish.

We think of the Wise Men, who came with their Gifts, following the Star. And we pray that today the knowledge and power which men have gained by discovering the secrets of earth and sky may be devoted to the good of the world and not its ill, and may be used to save life and not to destroy it. We pray that the children of the future may escape the doom of war, and that all the sons of men may come together within the City of the Light.

We think of the Shepherds, who heard the glad tidings while doing their daily work, abiding in the field. And we pray for all Toilers to whom this happy season means weary hands and feet and long hours of labor. May they be visited by the strong comfort which has its abiding place in common things! And we pray for those in distress because no man has hired them. May they find refuge in the help of Man; and may all the world have new hope!

We think of all who heard the Song in the Night, sounding faint and far away. And we pray for those who will keep their Christmas in strange places and away from their dear homes. We pray for those upon whom the enchanted season throws a shadow of happy years gone by. May they light candles of patience, kindness, and grateful memory, even when there are dark corners in their hearts. So may all our separations show us how far love can reach, and our broken circles teach us how closely love can bind.

God of all the Ages and of the Light that lighteth every man, we bless thy Holy Name; and, with the multitude of the heavenly host and with the magnitude of the lowly ones of earth, we praise thee, saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. —*Vivian T. Pomeroy.*

THE HOLY DAY IN THE HOLIDAY

In His Name, a Merry Christmas!

But remember, we are advised, the spirit of Holy Day should not be lost in the spirit of holiday.

With that suggestion, we may recall, though not that it makes any great difference when the event of Bethlehem is celebrated, that the actual date of the birth of Christ is not known.

The chief influence in determining our present date, we read, was the incidence of the winter solstice, which from old has been a time of festival. It was around it that the Roman Saturnalia gathered. Because the solstice marked the shortest day and the sun began again his upward course, there was a feeling of joy and relief. Men knew that spring was coming to touch the sleeping earth and bring light and joy in her train. It was one of those pagan festivals which were a constant problem to the Church, and in the end the Church took over the old date so fixed in the customs of the people, and sought to graft the Christmas festival into the old pagan tree.

"Thus," says *The Churchman Afield*, "we owe no small debt to those ancient festivals, of which Yule log and mistletoe are still an evidence, for this so appropriate setting of Christmas. The season comes as a restful pause, and sets our lives to a new music, ready for the New Year."

"Christmas, like other high days in the calendar, is a holy day before it is a holiday, a ritual of remembrance—a festival of the Christ child, of a coming beyond all telling wonderful, that has changed the face and the course of history.

"Christmas, merely as a holiday — a day in which eating and drinking take the place of work—is a poor affair. The day has then lost its real content and significance, and however boisterous the spirits may be, they are far removed from the true Christmas spirit.

"We may presume to have shared in that spirit, and yet in reality have come nowhere near it. Apart from its religious meaning, the day loses its proper flavor, its thrill, and wondering joy.

"It should be a pilgrimage of the spirit to a manger and the Divine Child, a participation in all the holy happenings of that day, from the angel hymn to the worship and the bringing of gifts. The more we enter into that, the wonder and romance of it, the more truly shall we keep Christmas, and the more deeply know the Christmas spirit.

In Bethlehem the dreams of the ages came true; "the Word became Flesh" and dwelt among men, and those who saw the light and love in that life felt that God had indeed "visited and redeemed His people." And, continues *The Churchman Afield:*

"The light that shines there is manifold, and even yet is only dimly seen and followed.

"In that manger the Divine and human meet.

"There as not elsewhere may we know the sanctity and blessing of homely, simple, human services and affections.

"For that manger has consecrated them forever.

"The Incarnation is the answer to all dualistic theories of life that fix a gulf between divine and human. It is the revelation of the divine in and through the human, the irradiation and redemption of the commonplace.

"It is the fulfilling of that ancient and beautiful dream of a ladder set up from earth to heaven, the assurance that the common ways and wanderings of life shall be brightened with a divine ray.

"That is the uniqueness of Christianity. Its spirituality is inclusive rather than exclusive. It makes no demand that we should stop life in order to become religious, as in the case of fakir and ascetic.

"It does not ask us to trample on a single healthy human instinct, or to despise any truly human duty in the interests of a false and anemic spirituality.

"A manger and a wooden cross, a cup of cold water and a widow's mite—the home at Nazareth — the friendships of Bethany—on these the light falls.

"To worship at Bethlehem should renew vision and restore faith in the possibilities of *our* life.

"It ought to mean new hallowings and new inspirations.

"For the light of that manger falls right across life and toil; the halo is no mere priestly fancy, it is the very truth of God.

"Especially does it shine about all child life. It is there in the humblest place, around every cradle and in the poorest home, for even manger and stable failed to hide that light.

"Christmas is thus a supreme opportunity, the calendar's Crowning Mercy. 'Let us go even unto Bethlehem' can do great things for us. The hours taken for such pilgrimages of the spirit are not wasted. It seems necessary to insist on that in our strenuous and fevered days.

"The old artist, whose friends found him with a far-off look in his eyes, and brush idle in his hands, replied to their protests that in such hours he made most progress, the hours of dream and of vision."—*The Literary Digest.*

WITH OUR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE CHRISTMAS TRAIL

Out in the snow, which whirled like white dust around them, struggled the three Enderson boys and the three little "Eskies," Tato, Marto, and Annweeza. Now night was coming, that early winter night of Alaska, which begins soon after midday. The trail from the huts where they all lived not far from the sea, to the station beyond the trees and very close to the first hill, was a trail which they had known very well in summer time. But now, none could see it. The wind had whisked snow into every hollow.

They were not scared, because they could still see the black trees. If they kept on, pushing one long snowshoe in front of the other, the five younger ones following Roy Enderson, they would soon see the lights in the station.

Every few minutes Roy pointed with his furry right hand, and said: "Keep your eyes on the trees over there!"

The wind whirled the snow faster.

"It's like a white darkness," said Larry Enderson, who was walking behind Roy. "I can't keep my eyes open."

"I can't, either," said Thad. "Maybe we've lost the trail, Roy."

But Roy could not hear Thad. All he could hear was the roar of the wind and the strange soft whisper of snow.

He shouted at the top of his own voice as he glided forward: "The trees are there on the right hand. We'll be at the station in a little while now."

Thad could just hear Roy. He knew that the "Eskies," plunging along behind, were out of earshot; so he repeated Roy's words, adding: "You coming? Tato? Marto? Annweeza?"

"Us come!" Faintly the cheerful cry came back to Thad. "Come—Christmas house—"

Thad laughed to himself. "Good little Eskies!"

Ever since the Thanksgiving celebration at the station they had all looked forward to taking the "Christmas trail" on this afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December. They were to have gone with a dog team, in charge of Indian Benny, who lived with the Endersons. But, early that morning, Benny had remembered that his own little boy and girl were expecting him home for Christmas; and after asking forgiveness of the Enderson boys, he left by the north trail.

"There goes our Christmas fun!" said Larry as the dog team disappeared. "We can't go to the station now, I suppose."

"Maybe we can," said Roy, thoughtfully. "We know the way."

"The station is four miles from here." Mr. Enderson shook his head. "I can't spare the time to go with you—with all the other men gone."

It was a lonely little strip of land, jutting across the mouth of a river, upon which the Endersons lived, with a few native Eskimos in the neighborhood. Sometimes, even in winter, boats landed from the big ships anchored far out in the sea; and there was need for someone always to be on duty at his lonely place. If all other trails were closed, this nameless spot kept open some sort of communication with the outer world.

"We know the trail well. I do, anyway. I could find the station blindfolded," Roy said. "The Eskies will be disappointed if they can't go to the 'Christmas house.' That's what they've been calling the station lately."

"If we start just before it begins to get light, we could get there before dark," Thad suggested.

"Well, all right. I'll telephone the station to send some one to meet you." Mr. Enderson took down the receiver, and as he waited for the "central" call, which was the station itself, he nodded to the three anxious boys, saying:

"Hurry, now. Get ready to start. I'll go a little way with you."

Larry ran to call the "Eskies." Roy and Thad got into their warmest furs. All who were taking the "Christmas trail" were ready and waiting, but Mr. Enderson still tried to talk with the station.

"Something's wrong," he said, coming

out where the boys and small Annweeza stood in snowshoes, impatient to start. "As soon as you reach the station, tell them I couldn't raise them on the telephone. Come now, I'll see you through the first twists of the trail. We'll take it fast."

The man lifted Annweeza, snowshoes and all, to his shoulder, and off they started. When he put her down, he was saying:

"Keep straight ahead, with the trees on your right hand. The station lights will show you the way after you pass the trees. Good-by, and Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" the travelers called, as they sped along. Long after Mr. Enderson was out of sight, Annweeza echoed the greeting.

It seemed to Thad suddenly that he was alone in the snowy darkness. He stopped for a moment, and shouted "Roy!" "Larry!" "Tato!" Behind him the quick little "Eskies" came hurrying.

"Whatta matta?" they giggled.

"Roy!" Thad called at the top of his voice. "Larry!"

There was no answer.

"We four must keep together," he said. "Walk fast."

After a few desperate minutes they bumped into Larry; but still they could not for a little while longer make Roy hear them. He must have whirled around, for all at once his voice was near, shouting:

"Are you all there? Thad? Tato? Marto? Annweeza?"

"I'm here." It was a queer roll call out in the snowy wilderness.

"Listen," shouted Roy, solemnly. "We just can't be lost, but I don't see the trees now. I think we'll reach the station before long now. Everybody sing! Sing the Christmas song."

They trudged on. Before they had sung all the verses the third time, what looked like a long gray shadow spread before them.

"Who's that?" they all demanded.

"Whoo-ee 'at?" an echo seemed to answer.

"Indian Benny?" Thad recognized the faint voice. "Are you lost, Benny? Are you hurt?"

"Me come take 'um station house," replied the Indian, who seemed to be hidden somewhere beneath the furs on the sled. "Me no good. Me lose Christmas trail."

"Did Dad send you after us?" asked Roy.

"No. Me take 'um boy—girl—station house. Me come get—"

"He says he's taken his boy and girl to the station already," Thad said. "Say, Benny, when did you leave?"

"Maybe ten minute." The Indian groaned. "Me hurt. Me got bad leg."

"Why, we must be almost there," exclaimed Roy. "Don't worry, Benny—we'll take care of you."

The dogs were plunging now. Roy loaded the five Endersons and "Eskies" on the sled, and gave the order to the leader. Blindly, he thought, the animals leaped out. But they well knew where food and rest awaited. The station lights were shining brightly within the next few minutes.

"Have we come to Christmas?" asked Annweeza, as the door opened and the men inside began to help the travelers to shed their frosted furs.

A tree with red candles on it and many sticks of candy standing up like a picket fence under it stood in the corner beyond the stove. Indian Benny's little Jan and Keety were staring with such big eyes that they looked like a boy and a girl doll beside the tree.

"Of course we've come to Christmas," laughed Thad. "The end of the Christmas trail—isn't it?"—*Winifred Davidson in The Christian Register.*

CHRISTMAS EVE

By Kate Douglas Wiggin

My door is on the latch tonight,
The hearth fire is aglow;
I seem to hear swift passing feet—
The Christ Child in the snow.
My heart is open wide tonight
For stranger, kith or kin;
I would not bar a single door
Where Love might enter in.

CHRISTMAS BELLS

By Elizabeth R. Bouret

Peal sweetly, ye Christmas bells!
Sweeter than e'er before;
Another year is passing
Through Memory's open door!
Ring in a Happy New Year,
With many sunny days,
And grace to find in shadows
Some cause for thankful praise!
Ring in the joys of friendship,
The loyal hearts and true,
Which beat with strong affection
Though skies be dark or blue!
Ring in a special blessing
To last the New Year through,—
To those I love, and who love me—
The old friends, and the new.

Seek to be lovable if you would be loved.

FOR CHRISTMAS

By Violet Alleyn Storey

And what do I want for Christmas?
Perfumes and jewels to wear?
Nay, such were the gifts that kings bore
Who thought a King was there,
When in the darkness, on the hay,
A Babe in need of comfort lay.
Then what do I want for Christmas?
To watch a Star with you
In wonder, still as the shepherds';
To hear songs fill the blue,
And, dreaming of that Babe asleep,
To have a child's faith, sweet and deep!

—Good Housekeeping, New York.

Where our hearts to love are stirred
Still the angels' song is heard.

Peace with other men and with one's self depends upon peace with God.

THE CHEERFUL LETTER EXCHANGE

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To help those who live far from schools, or who wish to continue their studies by means of correspondence with a teacher.

To establish Circulating Libraries in isolated communities, schools, and colleges in rural and mountain districts where public libraries and other educational privileges are not available.

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